

Postscripts by Jack Post

Last week when the flood tides rose over the marshes in the late afternoon, the minnows came up the inlets into the shallow places, skittering away from the dark shadows moving in the depths of the bank. Up in the wiry saltgrass, in the warm water minute creatures were dropping from the reeds as the level rose, leading the schools of tiny swimmers to cavort around the stems, then to leap clear of the mirror surface before falling back with a splash just audible six inches away.

In the bay, outboards were towing fledgling water skiers, never quite able to take off into a lighter medium, eventually falling back into wet oblivion, to wait for the circling boat to return with the rope streaming out behind that would lift them again above the water, almost to the freedom of flight. Shouts came clear over the staccato of the motors, strange interruptions to the quietness over in the submerged marsh. The shadow of a gull drifting past suddenly stilled the concentric ripples as the minnows streamed to the safety of the murky depths of the ditches.

In the cloudless sky, the warm sun no longer burned as it had a week or two earlier. With no hint yet of crispness in the air, the world seemed to be resting, relaxing in the last indolence of summer, anticipating a change that would no longer roll heat waves east from the scorched prairies, but would instead drive in bright coolness from the distant mountains.

Out of the Caribbean on Saturday a tropical storm swirled north, then veered east toward the New England coast. Boatmen furling sails in the thickening atmosphere of the last quiet afternoon re-checked their moorings or gave the anchor line a few more feet of scope. The storm predictably would curve out to sea, but an experienced sailor takes no chances. If the storm hit, that would be too late to get ready.

Before dawn Sunday morning, the wind was tearing the rain-heavy leaves from the trees, and even wrenching off loose branches. Early church-goers drove through windfalls and around lakes in the low spots, propelling sheets of water over the sidewalks into the hedges along the almost deserted streets. Later in the morning, anxious owners crowded behind whatever shelter they could find at the waterfront, watching their boats leap and plunge at their hawsers as the blown spume scudded past. The ebbing tide, running with the wind drove all the craft in one direction then, but later in the day with the flood battling back against the gale, the undertow in the basin began to swing the deep-keeled boats in crazy gyrations contrary to the force of the wind. The current would twist them half around, the wind would buffet them almost flat to the spindrift, until, recovering, they would rear back to tear at the restraining shackles of the moorings.

One after another, the round bottomed sailboats in the shallow water tipped over on their sides before the force of the gale. Some others drifted ashore or had to be rescued by the harbor master; but with the exception of a powerboat or two, most of the craft in the basin rode out the winds and the shifting tides with no more damage than a few chafed lines or a sodden hull half full of water.

Ashore, the clean-up of the debris and the necessary repairs in the wake of the scouring waters took over from tennis and golf on Labor Day. Some few wires had gone down, but most people had managed to sit out the near hurricanewatching the Olympics in distant Munich, with scarcely a thought for the ravaging winds and pelting rain beyond their walls, except that it was keeping the children indoors and momentarily interrupting the belated rush of the Red Sox toward another impossible dream.

On Monday the chipmunks peered fearfully from their damp holes, the gray squirrels began once again to strip the pine cones for their winter stores, the birds shook the droplets from their feathers, and down in the marsh the minnows slipped in again with the high tide to ripple the surface of the water as they fed. The wind blew gently from the north, with an ever so slight nip in the air that had not been there before the storm. Summer had almost run its course.

CARRIE WAS A GAL(E)

photos by John Nordell
and Walter Prince



